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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [PHUM](#) [EINV](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: SECRETARY'S INTERNET FREEDOM SPEECH: CHINA REACTION

Classified By: DCM Robert Goldberg fo Reasons: 1.4(B), (D).

Summary

1. (C) Secretary Clinton's January 21 speech on Internet Freedom touched a nerve in China. Official reaction was negative, with harsh criticism coming from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in an official statement and from other parts of the Chinese system through critical articles and editorials in the official press. Chinese Internet censors were deployed in force to block online commentary and coverage of the Secretary's speech, and as of January 24, sites in the United States that carried transcripts of the speech were inaccessible without VPN or other firewall-evading software. The few Chinese netizens and bloggers who did manage to access the speech and then dared write about it were generally supportive of the Secretary's message. Other Embassy contacts, including academic USA-watchers and journalists, lamented that the Secretary's speech would strengthen and embolden those in the Chinese system who advocated greater control over the Internet in China. They expressed concern that Internet freedom would be made into an "us vs. them" issue rather than a "right vs. wrong" issue. Contacts warned that Chinese officials see U.S. efforts to promote Internet freedom as an attack, repeatedly invoking the specter of "color revolution." Some contacts in the tech industry praised the speech as being "spot on" in its coverage of U.S. firms' difficulty with the Chinese business environment. Contacts outside Beijing were cautious with their comments. Embassy and consulate officers will continue to follow the reaction to the Secretary's remarks in the weeks ahead to assess their continuing impact on government, think tank, media, blogger and business actions with regard to the Internet. End Summary.

Official Reaction Negative

2. (C) In a January 22 statement in reaction to the Secretary's Internet freedom speech, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Ma Zhaoxu, said "we firmly oppose such words and deeds, which are against the facts and harmful to U.S.-China relations." Ma's remarks followed a January 21 press conference by Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei's in which he did not refer to the Secretary's speech, but urged the United States to refrain from "over-interpreting" the Google case, saying it should not be allowed to impact bilateral relations. Ma's statement was much more negative than initial unofficial comment from working-level MFA officers the morning of January 22. Asked about the speech, MFA North American and Oceanian Affairs Department U.S.A. Division Director An Gang told poloff that the MFA noticed that specific Chinese cases or individuals were not mentioned in the speech, and that "we are very happy about that." (Comment: the contrast between the "softer" comments from the USA desk and the harder language from the Spokesman several hours later suggests that the negative reaction to the speech originated at higher levels in the foreign policy hierarchy.)

Media Reaction Dutifully Echoes MFA Criticism

3. (SBU) Chinese media coverage of the Secretary's speech widely quoted the MFA statement. January 22 coverage included assertions that the Secretary's call for unrestricted access to the Internet could be regarded "as a disguised attempt to impose U.S. values in the name of democracy." Articles in the nationalist daily Global Times stated that the bulk of Internet comment originated in the West, "loaded with aggressive rhetoric against other countries," against which other countries cannot hope to defend. Beijing University Professor of Communications Hu Yong, quoted in the 21st Century Business Herald, said the Secretary's discussion of sharing technology to allow users to circumvent Internet censorship meant that the "Google incident is only the beginning of a rolling snowball."

4. (SBU) Most regional reporting in China emphasized that Internet freedom has now become embedded as a new diplomatic tool the U.S. foreign policy. Shanghai's influential Wenhui Daily ran a January 23 commentary calling Secretary Clinton's remarks "arrogant, illogical, and full of political shows and calculations," accusing her of having a "Cold War mentality." Some Chinese outlets rebutted U.S. charges by praising Chinese Internet practices. January 22 televised news programming reported on the benefits for Chinese users of Chinese governmental supervision of the Internet. Shanghai TV January 22 broadcast programming which painted Chinese online police in a positive light.

BEIJING 00000183 002 OF 005

Blogger Community: Those that Saw it, Liked it

5. (SBU) Chinese netizens accessed the Secretary's speech and shared reactions through rough real-time translations on Twitter, blogs, and Google. The range of opinions among the self-selecting demographic of Chinese netizens, who had circumvented Chinese government blocks to blog and participate in Twitter-based discussions, ranged from supportive to skeptical, with the majority expressing agreement with the principles outlined in the Secretary's

speech. In general, Chinese netizen comments focused on speculation about linkages between the Secretary's speech and Google's announcement that it was considering withdrawing from China.

16. (SBU) Many netizen reactions echoed the statements by XXXXXXXXXXXX who tweeted that Secretary Clinton's speech "clarified the relation between Internet freedom and business prosperity, which gave wrote that the speech was "certain to have a positive effect and was welcomed by Chinese Internet users regarding the censorship problem in C

17. (SBU) Some Chinese bloggers viewed the Secretary's speech as "confrontational," but nonetheless inspiring to the Chinese people.
- XXXXXXXXXXXX, depicted Secretary Clinton as Joan of Arc, with a widely distributed graphic of "Hillary leads the people." Another Chinese Twitter user wrote, "What a historic speech it is the launching of an Internet war, the confrontation between democracy and authoritarianism becoming public, and the beginning of a new Cold War."

- XXXXXXXXXXXX, a blogger based in XXXXXXXXXXXX, similarly characterized the speech as "a declaration of war from a free nation to an autocracy. It might be as important as Churchill's Iron Curtain Speech... I will wait with hope. The direct mention of China also calls for a frank and honest discussion between Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao."
-XXXXXXXXXXXX, attending a Mission sponsored event in Beijing (see para 21), said the Secretary's speech "showed the power of the Internet to the world" and raised the U.S. Internet strategy to a new level.

18. (SBU) Some bloggers expressed skepticism.
- XXXXXXXXXXXX tweeted, "the U.S. government has been talking about supporting world-wide Internet freedom for ages, but it hasn't done much yet."
- XXXXXXXXXXXX, doubted the sincerity of the United States' commitment to the freedoms mentioned in Secretary Clinton's speech due to competing commercial and national security interests.
Chinese bloggers, regardless of their outlook, have widely reported that Chinese web monitors have been aggressively deleting posts and content related to the Secretary's speech.

China Watchers: Speech Will Provoke the Authorities

19. (C) Other contacts analyzed the Secretary's speech the way bloggers did, but were pessimistic about the effect of the speech on Chinese authorities. On January 22 XXXXXXXXXXXX told poloff that following the controversy generated by Google's announcement, the issue of Internet freedom had been discussed several times within the Politburo Standing Committee which had agreed that the issue of Internet freedom had supplanted traditional human rights issues as a new "battleground" between the United States and China. Although he was not aware of any specific Standing Committee decisions, XXXXXXXXXXXX said that President Hu Jintao had provided general guidance that the issue should not be allowed to cause major disruptions to U.S.-China relations.
110. (C) On January 21, speaking before the Secretary's speech, XXXXXXXXXXXX, told poloff that the Communist Party viewed Internet freedom initiatives as a direct challenge to its ability to maintain social and political stability and, therefore, its legitimacy. He said that, in this context, the Party would resist international pressure on the Google issue and would increase restrictions on the Internet in the period leading up to the 18th Party Congress in 2012. He predicted that the Secretary's speech

BEIJING 00000183 003 OF 005

would be viewed as directed at the Communist Party and would therefore generate uncertainty about U.S. intentions towards China.

111. (C) On January 23, a prominent XXXXXXXXXXXX University media and public opinion researcher pointed out that most Chinese media reactions to the Secretary's speech had simply republished the MFA statement and were not printing any quotations from the speech itself. Given the political sensitivity of the speech and the Google case, this was the only safe thing to do, he said. Any perceived support for the Secretary's speech in the press would "cross a red line" with censors. XXXXXXXXXXXX said the Chinese public had mixed feelings about the speech and the Google issue. While many in China were dissatisfied with Internet censorship, they also resented public criticism from U.S. officials, he said, predicting that the speech would increase nationalist sentiment in China. Another contact, XXXXXXXXXXXX agreed that while it might cause a nationalist response, the Secretary's message "needed to be said." He predicted that the Chinese government would attempt to appeal to nationalism to counter the Secretary's speech. However, he noted that most current media commentary critical of the speech, and Google, was not being written by well known journalists, intellectuals or scholars whose silence could be read as a show of support for the speech - and for Google.

112. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX, told poloff January 23 that he had been "disappointed and depressed" when he read the Secretary's speech. "Those who tried to control the Internet more in China never had much support before," he said. "Most people believe information should be open, and the Internet should be open. The conservative, security people were the minority and many people just laughed at them." The Secretary's speech, however, gave great new energy to the "controllers" who could now plausibly argue that the United States was explicitly using the Internet as a tool for regime change. "The Internet belongs to every country," he complained; "we all can go there, we all can add to it, we all can learn from it. We Chinese were free there. Now the United States has claimed it for itself and so it will become an ideological battlefield." He asserted that, in the past, the Chinese authorities had paid relatively little attention to controlling the Internet, focusing only on the issues that were the most urgent and letting most netizens alone. "That is finished now. The Secretary's 'information curtain' remark will give the authorities what they need to 'harmonize' the Internet for all Chinese citizens." (Comment: 'harmonize' is an acidly sarcastic term in Chinese to describe official deletion or blockage of Internet content. XXXXXXXXXXXX is nearly always laid back and even-tempered. His commentary on this issue was more emotional and bitter than poloff has seen from him in dozens of encounters over three years, even on extremely sensitive issues such as XXXXXXXXXXXX.

113. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX warned that Google's announcement had become a new irritant to the bilateral relationship with the

potential to be even more dangerous than the Taiwan and Tibet issue. XXXXXXXXXXXX said that many Chinese citizens believed that Google's decision was part of a coordinated public/private effort by the USG to impose U.S. values on China, what he referred to as an "E-color revolution." As confirmation of this theory, XXXXXXXXXXXX cited Secretary Clinton's January 7 "21st Century Statecraft" dinner with several tech sector CEOs (including Google), Google's donations to President Obama's presidential campaign, and Secretary Clinton's January 21 speech on Internet freedom.

¶14. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX warned that there were people in China and other countries such as Iran who might see the "shadow of color revolution" in recent USG policies promoting Internet freedom and 21st century e-diplomacy. For example, Iranians might perceive Washington's new initiatives on Internet freedom or the advocacy of new technologies such as Twitter to be "aggressive" or harboring ulterior motives, such as promoting regime change, said XXXXXXXXXXXX. Informed Chinese netizens already know how to circumvent the Great Firewall to access Facebook and Twitter, Guo said, including by using commercially available software. He feared, however, that if the USG provided free software that helped Chinese netizens overcome filters, this might politicize the issue of Internet freedom and force the PRC government to react. One possible

BEIJING 00000183 004 OF 005

consequence, warned XXXXXXXXXXXX, was that China might make it illegal to download either U.S.-provided or commercially available software that helped Internet surfers circumvent the Great Firewall.

¶15. (C) Professor XXXXXXXXXXXX said January 22 that restricting the Internet access of Chinese netizens would theoretically hamper development of cutting edge industries, but was skeptical this had happened in reality. Professor XXXXXXXXXXXX, said in the same meeting that the problem was that China's leaders did not yet feel comfortable with these new communications technologies and thus preferred to proceed cautiously. The Google issue and Secretary Clinton's speech were likely to prompt them to shift from a low-profile to a higher-profile response on Internet freedom.

IT Industry: Speech Accurately Portrayed Business Environment

¶16. (C) The president of XXXXXXXXXXXX, called the Secretary's speech "spot on," directly capturing industry concerns about a business climate that is getting worse on a "day-to-day basis." He applauded the Secretary's speech as a means of bringing the Chinese to the table to address key concerns about the business environment and said the decision taken by Google was of enormous magnitude, indicating the depth of concern over issues it is facing here. As a result, he believes, the Chinese government's failure to respond to its people's opposition to censorship would embolden the netizen community in its efforts to evade government controls.

¶17. (C) Another high-tech industry consultant expressed concern that the Secretary's speech would dampen the U.S.-China business climate and drive it "to a new low." The consultant observed that "China has noticed that the NSA and the Pentagon have dominated cyberspace policy for over a year." Key officials, academics, and military leaders, according to this consultant, hold paranoid fears that the U.S. would one day launch a "zero-day" attack on all of China's critical infrastructure. The Secretary's speech and Google's recent actions, would amplify this belief.

¶18. (C) Reaction in northern China, where Intel has a multi-billion dollar manufacturing factory investment under construction, however, has thus far been limited. XXXXXXXXXXXX told XXXXXXXXXXXX that the Secretary's speech had thus far not created a stir. XXXXXXXXXXXX had in the past several days met with several Dalian Vice Mayors, and reported Google and Internet freedom issues had not been raised.

¶19. (C) South China-based Internet portal contacts were reluctant to talk with ConGenoffs about ongoing media coverage of Google or broader internet freedom issues. A public relations manager from XXXXXXXXXXXX initially refused to comment, saying it was not appropriate for her to offer an opinion on policy matters, but then guardedly reverted to official-sounding comments about why Internet regulation is important for the well-being of Chinese users and the maintenance of a positive online environment.

¶20. (C) A working-level official from the XXXXXXXXXXXX went further in sharing pro-government comments with ConGenoff, saying that Google is a business and should restrict itself to business matters, rather than venturing into political territory. The official said 2009 was a very strong year for internet companies in China and that internet restrictions had not dampened individual user's online experiences or companies' earnings.

Mission Outreach on the Secretary's Speech

¶21. (C) January 22, Embassy Beijing and Consulates General Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenyang hosted a simultaneous digital video conference viewing of the Secretary's speech for dozens of local bloggers, with an additional 300 netizens attending via the Internet. Mission estimates indicate Twitter communications and blog entries will reach a combined audience of millions of persons. Following the speech, participating bloggers, who were generally supportive of the Secretary's message, engaged in a lively discussion focused on what specific measures the United States government could take to promote Internet freedom in China and whether the speech constituted a new direction for U.S. foreign policy on

BEIJING 00000183 005 OF 005

China.
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